A Whisper of Destiny and Other Poems

By

Virginia Bioren Harrison

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A WHISPER OF DESTINY

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AND OTHER POEMS

BY

VIRGINIA BIOREN HARRISON

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By Virginia Bioren Harrison

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THIS LITTLE BOOK OF VERSE
IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED
TO MY BROTHER
J. S. B

For the permission to reprint many of these verses, acknowledgment is gratefully made to The Century Magazine, The Independent, Everybody's Magazine, Messrs. Harper and Bros., Munsey's Magazine, The Sunday School Times, Good Housekeeping, The American Magazine and The New Age.

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A WHISPER OF DESTINY

A WHISPER OF DESTINY

Heaven's dome was filled with silvery song,
That night long centuries ago,
When Eastern Kings, who had journeyed long,
Were bending low —
Were bending low.
(By the Lake of Gennesaret far away
A slender sapling swayed in play.)

Not theirs alone the homage paid
By Kings that night of Jesus' birth —
Their worship but foreshadowed that
Of all the earth —
Of all the earth.
(But never a nest nor song of bird
In the sapling's boughs was built or heard.)

A WHISPER OF DESTINY

None but the dark-eyed mother saw
The thorn crown round her baby's head,
And the mystic light, that glorified
The lowly shed —
The lowly shed.
(Soon mist spread o'er the wavering sea
And tremors stirred the cypress tree.)

None saw but she the phantom sword
That should her own soul pierce. — And far
She heard the name of "Mary" float
To outmost star —
To outmost star.
(Was a whisper of destiny thither blown,
Or 'mid the leaves did the wind make moan?)

A WHISPER OF DESTINY

Ah! strange misgivings mingled with
Wild joy within the Virgin's breast,
While angel's softest voices lulled
The Babe to rest —
The Babe to rest.
(And the shuddering tree to heaven made call
For the lightning's withering stroke to fall.)

But one prophetic seraph veiled
His face, while hymns triumphant rang
And in a sobbing minor strain
Of Calvary sang —
Of Calvary sang.
(Then cursing fate, in black despair
The cypress beat on the breezeless air —
The cypress that Christ's cross should be —
And silence lay on Gennesaret's sea.)

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS UPON THE HILL

O, a new star, a new star
Blazed like a lamp of gold.
For closely pressed to Mary's breast
The Savior Jesus lay at rest,
As prophets had foretold.

(But little Judas, as he slept,
Stirred in his mother's arms and wept.)

O, the night wind, the night wind
A new song found to sing,
Caught from the gleaming angel choir,
With harps of light and tongues of fire,
To praise the new-born King.

(But little Judas, as he slept,
Stirred in his mother's arms and wept.)

O, the worship, the worship
And myrrh and incense sweet,
Which shepherd kings from far away
Had brought with golden gifts to lay
At the Savior Jesus' feet.

(But little Judas, as he slept,
Stirred in his mother's arms and wept.)

THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

O, the shadow, the shadow
Of the cross upon the hill.
But yet the babe, who was to bear
The whole world's weight of sin and care,
On Mary's heart lay still.

(But Judas' mother with a cry,
Kissed him and wept, she knew not why.)

THE SINGERS' FLOWERS

"Write! write!" said he who bears aloft the flaming pen.
And one in glowing words depicted earth and sky
And sea, and sang so wildly sweet a tale of love,
That men's hearts thrilled and beat in unison with the song.
Then round the singer bloomed a wealth of passion flowers,
And many a red, red rose.
But God looked on these flowers,
And lo! like Dead Sea fruit, they naught but ashes were

Again the word went forth. Another singer seized
The inspired pen, and wrote a single verse, — the prayer
We children said each by his mother's knee, at night
Before we laid us down to sleep, and still is said
By countless baby lips. And at God's feet, before
The great white throne, he laid his little song. Then soft,
Like fluttering snowflakes, round him fell the children's prayers;
And straightway bloomed a mass of blue forget-me-nots,
That, blown by heaven's winds, breathe forth the singer's name
Before God's face forever and forevermore.

THE DYING YEAR

Take off this crimson robe,
With yellow broidery and brown;
  Unclasp the jeweled belt;
And from my head remove the crown
Of gold. Think you they grace
The closing eye, the pale, still face?

  Yet I would fain be fair
When they who knew me in the pride
  Of loving beauty, come
A silent throng and stand beside
My couch, with bated breath,
To see the face kissed white by Death.

So bring some snowy robe,
With border of soft down, to fold
About my fluttering heart
And limbs that seem so strangely cold.
And on my quiet breast
The white chrysanthemum shall rest.

For rose and passion-flower
Are mine no more. Think you they still
Would glow and perfume yield
If laid upon a heart grown chill?
Ah! no; from this sad hour
I wear no rose, no passion-flower.

And let the winter bring
His wealth of crystal gems, and now
With glittering coronet
Of icy diamonds deck my brow.
And men shall gaze and say:
How sweet a year to pass away!

HEIMWEH

When o'er the sunset's crimson bar
  The golden day has sailed away,
My homesick fancies wander far
  From hot roadway and pavement gray,
Where only weary creatures are.

I seem to walk the road once more
  Among the hills, by fields and rills;
And, from the millpond's lonely shore,
  The whip-poor-will's sad calling thrills
As in the twilight days of yore.

HEIMWEH

The old elm guards the fallen gate.
And though I know no flowers now grow
Within the garden desolate,
Yet, in the glow of Dreamland, Lo! —
It blooms in beauty's lost estate.

The silent house is Memory's home.
And O, some way, some happier day,
May I to that dear hillside come,
From hot roadway and pavement gray
To sleep — nor wake again to roam.

THE COUNTRY OF THE FEW STARS

The path that leads to Twilight Land
Is through an opal sky all rose and gold,
Where trailing banners of the vanquished day
From crimson change — and fade to gray away.

When stir the pines by night winds fanned,
When little birds their weary pinions fold,
And drowsy twitterings rise from many a nest,
The last red rays, far down the purpling West,
Illume the gate of Twilight Land.

The voice of Silence fills that land;
The mystic hour brings loved and lost ones
home;
Long silent lips breathe tender words once more
And vanished joys possess us as of yore.
The silver crescent in eve's hand,
The few stars low in heaven's dusky dome
Shine softly on this hour of Memory's dreams,
Till, like some dim mirage, which fading seems
Most lovely – · lost is Twilight Land.

OFF SWAMPSCOTT

The ocean's varying blue and green
Have changed to gray with night;
And from the western sky has paled
The saffron-colored light.

There lingers in the darkening east
A flush,— so faint it seems
As if the sun-forsaken sky
Were blushing in her dreams.

And now across the plain of heaven
The moon and slow stars creep,
As o'er the darkening fields at eve
Some shepherd leads his sheep.

And out upon the trembling depths
Lies wavering to and fro
The moonlight path, where sailors say
Strange phantoms come and go.

A company unseen, unheard,
A weird and shadowy throng,
Who rise with the rising moon to walk
This pathway all night long.

The semblances of swarthy men;
Pale shades of vikings fair;
And women with the seaweed dank
Entangled in their hair.

OFF SWAMPSCOTT

O summer moon, hide, hide thy face!
O bright path on the deep
In darkness fade away, and let
The shipwrecked sailors sleep!

O WIND FROM THE GOLDEN GATE!

Now dies the salt wind — breath of Eastward
seas —
And in the quivering leaves of whispering trees
Soft stirs the evening breeze.

From charmèd lands, O wind from out the West!
From slumbrous isles by sleeping waves caressed,
Thou bearest on thy breast
The languorous perfume of a thousand flowers,
The garnered sunshine of unnumbered hours,
The spice of Orient bowers.

O WIND

Thy pinions touch peaks ermined by the snow
And search deep cañons where wild waters flow,
And mighty cedars grow.
Thou art the voice of silent places lone,
That call me day and night — pools shadow strown,
And forest haunts unknown.

Now on thy wide-spread wings bring tranquil rest
And sway the jeweled fringe of dreams, O blest
Sweet wind from out the West!

MUSIC OF THE DAWN

(At sea — Oct. 23rd, 1907)

In far forests' leafy twilight, now is stealing
gray dawn's shy light,
And the misty air is tremulous with songs of
many a bird;
While from mountain steeps descending, every
streamlet's voice is blending
With the anthems of great pine trees, by the
breath of daylight stirred.

But I turn from Fancy's dreaming of the green
earth, to the gleaming
Of the fluttering wings of morning rushing
o'er the jewelled deep.
And the ocean's rhythmic pounding, with each
lucent wave resounding,
Seems the music made when God's own hands,
His mighty harp strings sweep.

NIGHT IN THE HILLS

Like sentinels upon the hillsides seem
The pines, through which the wandering west
wind sighs;
Above its trembling image in each stream
The slow moon moves across the star-flecked
skies —
And spellbound by the eyes of Night I dream,
For in their depths the charm of silence lies.

THE GRAY NUN

There comes, each dying day, to bless,
A little while before the night,
A gentle nun in convent dress
Of clinging robes, all gray and white.

She lays her cool hand on my face
And smoothes the lines of care away —
Her tender touch, with magic grace,
Dispels the worries of the day.

She folds the mystic curtain by,
Which hides from view the shadowy throng,
And gives me those for whom I sigh,
The vanished friends for whom I long.

Sometimes she brings a perfumed spray
Of flowers that bloomed long years ago,
The breath of Summers laid away
'Neath many a Winter's drifted snow.

No other guest gives such delight,
Nor can of peace bestow the same,
As she, who comes 'twixt day and night,
And Twilight is the gray nun's name.

MY CLOUD REALM

The Summer night winds stir the vine
About my window frame,
Where many a scarlet trumpet flower
Gleams like a tongue of flame;
The scent of mignonette floats from
The garden at my feet,
Like thoughts of love, long dead and yet
In memory faintly sweet.

O'er head I see a mystic world,
Which seems just mine alone,
Upon its purple seas there sail
No dreamships but my own —

And drifting like the floating reefs
On far away lagoons,
The lazy clouds are islands fair,
Where shine no blazing noons.

One dark and gloomy cloudlet is
The Isle of Grief, and waves
That moan o'er shipwrecked happiness
Break on its shore of graves.
But when I sail the moonlight Bay
Of Hope, 'mid stars, then stilled
Is every thought that springs from out
Life's promise unfulfilled.

And on a lotus leaf I drift,
By drowsy winds caressed,
Till, toil forgot, in languor steeped,
I reach my Isle of Rest.

Then when the rosy barge of dawn
Invades my sapphire sea,
'Tis mine no more till night restores
My Realm of Clouds to me.

THE CORONATION OF QUEEN INEZ

The spirit of Inez de Castro gazed
From heaven's jewelled gate of gold and saw,
Far down in Portugal's great palace — that
Which once was she, but now a shell, exhumed.
Upon a throne beside the King's, *it* sat
Attired in robes of silver flecked with pearls.
The hands that Pedro (ere he yet was King)
Had found so soft, but now were shrivelled skin
O'er bones, a sceptre held in lifeless grasp.
Upon the coils and braids of blue black hair
About the shrunken face, a crown of gold
And gems — a royal diadem — was set.
And all the proudest nobles of the realm

Before *this* bent the knee and kissed the hem
Upon the coronation robe of poor
Dead Inez, now crowned Queen of Portugal.

Then through the jewelled gate of heaven the soul
Of Inez flashed. Down — down, through seas of light
It sped and hovered near the royal throne.
She kissed King Pedro's brow — and, Ah! he dreamed
Of her dear kisses in those four bright years,
When he and she in secret marriage dwelt.
She sighed — and he in pity wept for her
Who murdered was, by his own sire's command.

She put her arms about his neck and laid
Her face against his cheek — and Pedro thought
Some cloud of incense touched him — but his heart
Beat faster and with mighty yearning longed
For those few vanished years, and in his arms
To hold his lost love to his breast once more.

Then from the throne, the dead queen's form was raised
And to a splendid tomb was borne, while close
Beside King Pedro, floating moved the soul
Of her he loved beyond the Gates of Death.
And to his heart there crept a wondrous peace,
As once again her lips touched light his own.

Then on slow wings she sought the jewelled
gates
Of Paradise for all Eternity.

AN AUTUMN THOUGHT

When through the leafless trees the cold wind sighs
And garnered is the wealth of golden grain,
On shivering wings the famished song bird flies
Some summer land to gain.

And so, on wings of faith, the soul shall rise
Beyond the chilling world, its grief and pain,
And 'neath the glory of celestial skies
Its summer land attain.

THE SUMMER NIGHT ORCHESTRA

When fades the gold from sunset sky,
When twilight's silvery sheen grows dim,
And twinkling lights gleam, one by one,
In marvelous order ranged in heaven,
There mingles with the mystery
Of night, a wondrous harmony.

Musicians, an unnumbered band,
Fill earth and air with ceaseless hum
Of strings and horns impalpable.
Against the dark sky, darker woods
Hold in their depths of oak and fir
The tree toad with bass viol strong —

And meadows shelter myriads
Of katy-dids, whose notes ring forth
With crickets' song antiphonal.

A blur of insect music fills
The orchestra's interstices
And mingles with the dewy scents,
That make the soft, damp air so sweet.

Far off upon the distant hills
A tiny huntsman's horn is wound
And from the young moon's crescent ship
We seem to hear clear elfin flutes.

SUMMER NIGHT ORCHESTRA

For one with ear attuned, the low
Sweet music of the winds amid
The pines, commingling with the dim
Night's voices multitudinous,
Is Nature singing us to sleep,
As mothers coo soft lullabies
To drowsy babes, who sink to rest.

BEATITUDES OF SEA AND EARTH AND SKY

Blessed is the sound when storms thro' lofty pine trees roar;
Blessed is the boom of waves upon some lone seashore;
Blessed in the woods, the gay duet of brook and leaves;
Blessed is the harvest moon on rows of tentlike sheaves;
Blessed is the sun by day, by night each God-set star;
Blessed are the silent haunts where shaded waters are;

BEATITUDES

Blessed is the dank earth-smell in forests' dusky glades;
Blessed is the crimson sky that slow to purple fades;
Blessed is the happiness, that Nature's hand-touch brings,
And eye and ear and heart that see and hear and love these things.

HOLLYHOCKS

The charm of bygone times and things,
To hollyhocks old-fashioned, clings.
On stately stalks their bells unfold
In many a garden quaint and old,
Round which are low stone walls, where twines
A verdant mass of wandering vines.
There dials mark the sunny hours,
Mid beds of sweet familiar flowers
And boxedged paths, long since first trod
By feet that rest now 'neath the sod.

But still the hollyhocks grow high,
With bells aflaunt as winds blow by —
And still at dark, those stately men
And dames of old walk there again —

And as the boxedged paths once more
They tread, 'mid flowers they loved of yore,
Their misty draperies in the breeze
Seem only cobwebs 'twixt the trees —
And their silken garments' soft frou-frou,
Like wind, that sighs the pine trees thro'.

But shadowy lips kiss shadowy hands,
Where the gray sun dial silent stands —
And lovers, who long since felt love's thrill,
In the garden old are lovers still.

CUM PRIMA LUCE

Chill winds that beat on the ivied wall
Sweep through the castle's lofty hall —
And far beneath, in dark abyss,
The gale tossed seawaves roar and hiss.

Tall, flickering candles scarce illume
The confines of a turret room,
Where, through the casement from afar
There shines no glint of moon nor star
Upon a mother, who half wild
With grief, kneels by her dying child.
Upon the other side, there stands
A radiant one, with outstretched hands,
Whose aureoled wealth of golden hair
Shines o'er a face divinely fair.

The mother pleads: " Forsake us not
My little maid! Hast thou forgot
The happy hours, when 'neath the shade
Of yonder greenwood trees we played;
Or how, when held in thy sire's arms,
The knights acclaimed thy childish charms
And swore on many a tourney's ground
To see thee Queen of Beauty crowned? "

Now speaks the angel low and sweet:
" In yonder greenwood, at thy feet
A serpent trailed across the grass,
Affrighting thee and then, Alas!
Thou didst fall down — and filled with fears,
Thy mother sought in pain and tears.

And so, in time to come, no joy
Would e'er be thine without alloy.
With jealousy and aching heart
Thou wouldst in feast and joust take part,
For knights, who crowned thee Queen one day,
The next would laugh and ride away.

Come thou with me, where streams and trees
And birds sing lovely symphonies
And many a little angel waits
To play with thee at heaven's gates."

The mother clasps the hand so small
And murmurs: "Do not heed the call —
The night outside is dark and cold;
No mother there thy hand to hold;
Against the crags the wild waves foam —
My little maid bide in thy home."

CUM PRIMA LUCE

The face upon the cot grows gray;
The pale lips sigh: " 'Tis break of day.
The casement open wide, that so
My soul with the angel forth may go.

" I love thee so, I'd spare thee pain,
But go I must — to plead is vain,
So sweet is she who calls me. Oh!
I pray thee Mother, let me go."

The spirit stoops and to her breast
Enfolds the child in dreamless rest.
And to the mother says: " Trust me!
Though dark the night and wild the sea,
Safe in my arms, nor storm nor pain
Shall touch thy little maid again —
Think not of me with bated breath,
God calls me Life whom men call Death."

CUM PRIMA LUCE

Now to the mother's anguished heart
The angel's words great peace impart —
She opes the casement toward the sun
And weeps: "Farewell my little one!"

The storm is spent. The waves no more
Beat 'gainst the tower with hiss and roar.
With morning's opal tints the world
Of land and sea spreads forth impearled,
While softly on the castle wall
The ivy branches rise and fall
And in the sky, past heaven's bar,
One silvery cloudlet flies afar.

THE SOLACE OF REMEMBRANCE

Think not the brown leaves, whirled by breath
of fall,
Are but evangels of the Winter drear:
'Mid Autumn's minor music they recall,
In happier strains, that Summer has been
here.
And so, when Memory's drifting leaves of
thought
Float 'round the darkening portals of the
heart,
Gray skies with gold and crimson shall be
fraught
In dreams of joys that came but to depart.

FAITH

Faith is the keynote of life's battle hymn;
The noon's straight sunbeam, lighting chasms dim;
The sinking in a father's arms to sleep
Assured that he the long night watch will keep.

A CHILD MARRIAGE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Lines in commemoration of the wedding of the grandson, namesake and heir of Sir George Carteret to the daughter of the Earl of Bath — read before the New Jersey Society of Colonial Dames at its second commemorative meeting at Trenton.

Across the broad Atlantic's breast
And broader sea of Time,
There gleams a tiny wedding ring,
And joybells faintly chime.
We lift the veil of vanished years,
And lo! before us stand
A boy of eight and maid of six,
With hand close clasped in hand.

A CHILD MARRIAGE

His snow white velvet suit is slashed
With pale pink here and there,
While from the cap to match, a plume
Droops on his flaxen hair.
White silken hose, a jeweled sword,
With knot of rosy hue;
And on each knee a huge rosette,
Which is of pale pink, too.

Which is it, think you, fills to-day
His boyish heart with pride,
And bids him toss his gallant head —
The swordlet or the bride?

A CHILD MARRIAGE

O'er English fields with wild flowers flecked,
The wind blows soft and sweet,
To lay its gift of perfume at
The little maiden's feet.

It stirs the locks, that tendril like
Wave round her bonny face,
And flutters 'mid the chestnut curls
Beneath her veil of lace.
Upon the ivory satin gown
Forget-me-nots are sewn,
Of turquoise made, like blossoms blue
Upon a snow bank strewn.

A CHILD MARRIAGE

She carries high her dainty head,
This daughter of an Earl,
Tiaraed with forget-me-nots
Encircling one great pearl.
The organ peals, the bridegroom doffs
His cap, then hand in hand
They tread the aisle with stately mien,
And at the altar stand.

On noiseless wings the crowding years
Once more press in between
This present place, this present time
And that strange wedding scene.

The church grows dim. The wavering forms
'Mid shadows seem to sway.
No faintest sound of music comes,
The vision fades away.

Farewell, Sir George! Farewell, wee bride!
We know naught of thy lot.
But through the years thy turquoise flow
Bid us forget thee not.

THAT JUNE MAY BIDE

No matter though December skies
  Hang low o'erhead;
No matter though the red rose dies
  And birds have fled;
If thou to Hope wilt open wide
  Thy bosom door
Then June will come to thee and bide
  Forevermore.

BENEATH MY ROOF-TREE

One dewy morn, when waking birds
  Their first low notes were trilling,
And perfume from each hawthorn hedge
  The wandering wind was filling,
I saw serene Contentment pass,
With step that scarcely swayed the grass.

So wondrous sweet and fair beyond
  All other friends I thought her,
That every day through woodland way
  And flowery field I sought her,
And called and called again her name,—
But never answering whisper came.

Then, vexed that she would not reply,
I cried in accents fretful:
" Contentment, where thou listest, go;
Nor will I be regretful.
I fain would have thee with me dwell;
But, since thou wilt not, fare thee well."

I sought my cot, where needlecraft,
The spinning wheels' swift whirring,
And housewife cares, gave wings to time,
And kept the life-tide stirring;
Forgot were wimpling burn and fell,
The sunlit mead and dusky dell.

A light footfall; a gentle knock;
A snowy kirtle fluttering
Within my door; a longed-for voice
My name in soft tones uttering;
And lo! beneath my own roof-tree
The long-sought one stood seeking me."

A SILENT SONG

God gave unto a chosen one
  The gift of poesy and song,
But ah! he sang of vanished hope,
  Life's bitterness, its pain and wrong,
Till hearts lost courage, eyes with tears
Grew dim, and souls were bowed with fears.

Another, poor and well acquaint
  With grief, yet met men with a smile
Which said, "How good God is, how sweet
  His gift of life!" and all the while
A new joy touched the passing throng —
An echo from a silent song.

THE BALLAD OF FRA PAOLO

Day after day, within the church at Ascoli, a young monk paints
With master hand on dome and walls, bright seraphim and blessed saints.

(But back on the hills, a garden lies —
A garden sweet as Paradise.)

The angels Fra Paolo paints, at Ascoli Piceno, bear
The face of one with glorious eyes and waving lengths of red bronze hair.

(And o'er a marble bench there grows
In that garden cool a crimson rose.)

BALLAD OF FRA PAOLO

There were in days not long gone by, twin
brothers, Esperi by name,
Who, one by sculpture, one with brush had
gained both fortune great and fame.

(There haunted paths, mosaic laid,
Lead 'round a vase crowned balustrade.)

Betrothed unto the painter was a girl of Rome,
bronzetressed and tall —
But women's hearts are fickle oft — and men's
hearts stray beyond recall.

(While passion flowers sway in the
breeze,
That stirs the sombre ilex trees.)

The sculptor won the woman's heart, but, with
remorse filled, to atone
He threw away God's gift of life — as 'twere
but thistledown, windblown.

(And the cypress, blackest shadows
throws
O'er haunted path and crimson rose.)

"So soon are we forgot when we are gone!"
The heart that lightly turned
From her betrothed, turned back again to where
Love's altar fires still burned.

('Neath the orange trees the blossoms lie,
By sobbing winds blown far and nigh.)

But happiness could not be grasped across the
low and verdant mound,
By him, whose loved twin brother lay there in
unconsecrated ground.

(Ah! where the fountains overflow,
Forget-me-nots are whispering low.)

So, in the church at Ascoli, a young monk paints
day after day —
But Memory, vows forgetting, strays from
prayer and cloister far away.

(And blown this way, then that, there
grows
O'er the marble bench a drooping rose.)

BANISHED LOVE

O shepherds! have ye wandering seen
A wingèd boy with blinded eyes?
I drove him from me yestere'en
Despite his tears and pleading sighs.

He bears a pretty bow and keen
Tipped arrows in his quiver lie.
O shepherds! tell me, have ye seen
This banished Love come wandering by?

Why shines the sun, regret to mock;
Why flaunt the flowers in hues so gay;
Why skip with joy the snowy flock
When poor lost Love is far away?

Unfeeling shepherds, wherefor smile
And point toward my breaking heart?
What, close behind me all this while!
— O, sweet! we two no more shall part.

THE FOREST IN WINTER

Who haunts the Wintry forest hears
The heart of Nature beat beneath
Her robe of snow and icy gems.

Think you the woods are but for days
When perfumed winds stir countless leaves
Whose low, sweet harmonies enthrall
The listening ear; when murmuring brooks
Hold converse with forget-me-nots
That deck the mossy banks; when on
The path are checkered sun and shade
Like little rippling waves of light?

Ah, no! There is no Summer sky
So blue as that, against which stand
The bare, brown trees with twigs enlaced,
Where chirp and twitter Winter birds.

On every side, from out the snow,
Sway ghosts of golden rod and stalks
With downy pods of milkweed capped.

The Erl King's tiny spears of frost
But make the bracing air more rare,
And on the ear attuned, there falls
From Nature's workshop, faint far sounds,
As nearer come the chariot wheels
Of Spring, toward the Winter woods.

WANDERLUST

A wind-swept cloud from the restless sea —
  A drifting cloud on the mountainside —
Sang: "Why so tamely cling, ye trees,
  To these silent heights? On the ocean's tide
Are life and paths to the ports afar
O'er the jeweled deep, 'neath the outmost star."

Then cursing its chains, an oak-tree grand
  With longing prayed for that restless sea,
Till ax and stream and the builder's hand
  The oak, a white-winged ship, set free,
In ecstasy, dreamlike, forth to fare
O'er lucent depths to the Everywhere.

Ah, the drifting cloud on the mountainside
Had whispered naught of storm and wreck;
But the oaken ship lies fathoms deep,
With the seaweed green on her lonely deck;
And oh, for the leaves and the birds' sweet song
And the voice of the forest the whole night long!

A JEST OF FATE

(Ten days after the earthquake, flowers were still blooming in a window-box high on a ruined palace wall.)

Like a flaming flow'r dropped on Messina's
dark pall
A geranium hangs in its deep crimson bloom
On a casement's broad ledge in the wavering
wall
Of what once was a palace — but now is a
tomb.

A JEST OF FATE

Is it only a jest of mad Fate 'mid the gloom,
Or a note of life's battle song, meant to recall
Hope and courage once more to the City of Doom —
That scarlet flow'r high on the tottering wall?

A SKATING RONDEAU

Two lovers they, on steel winged feet.
O'erhead the stars, a glittering fleet,
Through purple seas, untossed by gale
Toward that silvery harbor sail
Where fading eve and moonrise meet.
The world seems theirs alone — So sweet
That all life's vexing cares retreat
As speed they through the frozen vale.
Two lovers they.

A SKATING RONDEAU

They long not for the Summer's heat,
While Winter reigns with joys replete —
Nor Autumn's vanished hues bewail
When ice and snow the earth enveil,
And stars and skates in tune repeat:
Two lovers, they!

LIKE A PRESSED FLOWER

How soon, within the Book of Time,
  Life's latest hour
Will lay my memory — as we press
  Some curious flower.
Then, on th' enfolding page, I would
  God's hand divine
Might note: Though erring oft, this still
  Was child of mine.

THE SILENT MAN

When the battleships saluted General Grant's tomb on their return from the Spanish war.

The war-scarred battleships in garb of gray
Steam swiftly up the stream in proud array,
'Mid din of acclamation from the shore
And cannons' roar.

Abreast the lofty tomb on Claremont's height,
These latest heroes, fresh from glorious fight,
With thundering guns salute the warrior who
Rests there time through.

O, does the sword upon his breast stir not?
Think you the sounds of war are all forgot?
Leaps not his pulse with pride that he, too, won
As these have done?

Who knows? "The Silent Man" gives neither sign
Nor word. The ships sail back in stately line;
The low wind sweeps o'er Claremont's tomb-crowned hill,
And all is still.

A LOW MOUND IN THE WILDERNESS

I know a grave on Southern soil,
A lonely little mound,
Where three tall pines their sentry keep,
And scarce a sound

The silence breaks. Naught but the rush
Of storms, the carolling bird,
And soughing wind among the trees
Is ever heard.

No human hand has touched that "low
Green tent" through fifty years
Anear. The falling rain and dew
The only tears

Have been that moistened it. But far
North, where the cold waves foam,
A mother mourns her drummer boy
Who ne'er came home.

His comrades laid him here — the flag
Across his boyish breast,
And " for his mother " on his brow
A last kiss pressed.

But think not while a nation decks
The graves of hero dead,
That where this brave boy sleeps, no flower
Rests o'er his head;

A LOW MOUND

For sown by wandering winds, kept by
God's hand, a poppy seed
Took root and grew a thousand fold,
Its every need

By Him supplied. And when each year
Flowers deck the patriot's tomb,
That low mound in the wilderness
Is all abloom.

And ever o'er the drummer boy
The tall pines sentry keep,
And that day blooms a crimson pall
The "flower of sleep."

And when at eve through bluest skies,
  White cloud ships seem to sail
From star to star, and low the flowers
  Bend in the gale,

The blood-red poppies, snowy clouds,
  And sky of azure hue
Spread o'er the drummer boy God's own
  Red, white and blue.

TO MARCH

Dash on, Oh wild young charioteer!
The rushing winds, thy fiery steeds,
Wait but a call from thee to hear
Ere each from heaven's far boundary speeds,
With ice-shod hoof and streaming mane,
Thy shout his lash, thy voice his rein.

Dash on, mad youth from frozen lands
That ne'er by summer are caressed!
The leaping waves stretch high their hands,
In vain endeavor to arrest
Thy flight, to where, 'neath budding tree,
Thy sweetheart April waits for thee.

A BLESSED SPOT

In mother's room,
O blessed spot!
Where childhood's griefs were soon forgot.
For dreariest hour of wintriest day
Held still some lingering light of May
In mother's room.

In mother's room!
When hope betrayed,
Or Fortune's smile shone undismayed,
Less bitter seemed to grow the ill,
And happiness glowed brighter still,
In mother's room.

A BLESSED SPOT

In mother's room!
'Tis holy ground,
The threshold of a low, green mound;
For with crossed hands on faithful breast,
Life's first, best friend lay there at rest
In mother's room.

LULLABY

Sleep, baby, sleep!
Waiting near, with outstretched hands,
See the slumber Angel stands.
Every bird has sought its nest;
Lambs are in the fold at rest.
Sleep, baby, sleep!
God and Mother vigil keep.

Sleep, baby, sleep!
Through the trees the night-winds wail;
Past the stars the dream-ships sail,
Clouds for canvas, dreams for freight.
Hush, my sweet, the hour grows late.
Sleep, baby, sleep!
God and Mother vigil keep.

A VAIN WISH

I know a lake, which nestles where
Tall mountains rise nearby;
And on its quiet bosom floats
A pictured sky.

At night, the shepherd moon leads forth
On high his starry flock;
And on the wavering water's depths
Pale planets rock.

I'd ask no other Paradise
For heaven I'd never sigh,
If in this peaceful vale, my home
Might be for aye.

POT-POURRI

Time steals my sweetness all away
Cries fleeting youth in sad dismay,
Regretful.
Forgetful
That charm fades not though beauty may —
And the rose of to-day still sweet shall be
When Summer goes, as pot-pourri.

GOLDEN SILENCE

As blooms an ivory lily on some turbid pool,
Its perfumed heart by noisome ripples fluttered,
So o'er the soul depths where dark passions rule
Blooms that restraint, which holds harsh words unuttered.

MAY

Along the fields and waysides
A dainty maiden trips;
The grass springs green behind her
And from her finger tips
She scatters many a wild flower
And many a tulip fine,
And gilds the humble meadows
Where dandelions shine.

See! on the silent forest
She doth a light kiss press —
And slumbering forces waken
Beneath that soft caress.

She stoops to call the violets
  But near and far away
A myriad cry: We're waiting
  To welcome you, sweet May!

AFTERWARD

I heedlessly opened the cage
And suffered my bird to go free;
And, though I besought it with tears to return,
It nevermore came back to me.
It nests in the wildwood, and heeds not my call,
O the bird once at liberty, who can enthrall?

I hastily opened my lips,
And uttered a word of disdain
That wounded a friend, and forever estranged
A heart I would die to regain.
But the bird once at liberty, who can enthrall?
And the word that's once spoken, O who can recall?

ROSEMARY

One lonely twilight hour, when gray
Had grown the sky and sea,
Along the sands a slender form
Drew near and paused by me.

Starlike above a violet robe
Shone out her sweet, sad face,
And soft she crooned to soothe the babe
That lay in her embrace.

I asked her name, and grieved because
With tears her eyes were wet.
"Men call me Memory," she sighed,
"And this, my child, Regret."

IMPROVEMENTS ON THE HOMESTEAD

In the busy, dusty city
I dreamed of boyhood's days,
And the old stone homestead far away
Mid quiet country ways.
Its shingled roof all moss-grown,
Its walls so cool and gray,
And the vine-clad stoop where the old folks sat
To rest at close of day.

Then the dream became a longing,
And, traveling far and fast,
I came to the little village where
My childhood's years were passed,
And sought the quaint stone mansion,
But O, what change was there!
Bay-windows, balconies, and, at
One end, a *porte cochère.*

The walls were pumpkin yellow,
The shingled roof bright red,
And, at the side, a rounded tower
Reared high its upstart head.
No trace of home beloved!
No signs of days gone by!
Not e'en the long well-sweep that used
To point toward the sky.

IMPROVEMENTS

I felt as one who, bending
To look in some old face
He fondly loves, beholds it rouged —
Bereft of each dear grace.
So now, when of *improvements*
Men talk, my heart is sore,
And longs for the stoop where the old folks sat
To rest when day was o'er.

AMBITION

The hilltop be thy goal! 'Tis not
O'er steeples that we stumble —
'Tis over loose stones in the path
That plodding pilgrims tumble.
Though by ambition angels fell,
Without it, mortals ne'er excel.

A CHARM

Every gentle deed you do
One bright spirit brings to you —
One more angel, watch to keep
By your pillow while you sleep;
Softer makes the wind's weird song
Through the pine-trees all night long;
Clearer makes the white stars gleam
While you dream,
While you dream.

Every gentle word you say
One dark spirit drives away;
Makes the clover in the grass
Whisper greeting as you pass;

A CHARM

Swifter makes the cloud-ships fly
Through the ocean of the sky;
Daintier makes each frosty flake
When you wake,
When you wake.

TWIN GUESTS

One Summer day a chubby boy
With wings and blinded eyes,
Came clamoring at my door — and I,
To rid me of his cries,
At last said: "Love you may come in,"
When, with dismay at heart,
I saw the rascal enter with
Almost his counterpart,
Except that while Love smiled, this one
Did mournfully complain.

"Where'er I go," the blind boy said,
"Goes my twin brother, Pain."

They quickly drove calm Friendship out
And what with tears and smiles,
I could do naught but comfort Pain
And watch Love's pretty wiles.
And though sometimes in weariness
I wished them far away,
Again so sweet the torments were,
I plead with them to stay.

AN UNWRITTEN BOOK

Each new day is a golden book, pearl wrought,
Its hours are silvery pages pure as snow,
Where will be writ each word and deed and thought
That fill the flying moments as they go.
So mayst thou live that that bright one, who, with
His flaming pen records each action past,
God's pitying Angel, need not weep for thee
When "Finis" marks the fluttering page turned last.

IN THE FAR COUNTRY

In that far country o'er Death's sea,
I know that my heart often,
For those I've left, will homesick be.
Nor will heaven's raptures soften
The longing for my life lived here:
The morning's task — the evening cheer.

Shall I not miss the dusky night,
The wistful twilight hour,
The clocktower's chimes, the sweet delight
In each long tended flower?
Oh! in all Paradise there's not
A joy could make these be forgot.

THE LAND OF THE AFTERNOON

I know a wondrous land of pearl
And pink and golden gleam,
Above whose battlements of cloud
Broad crimson banners stream.

Beyond the azure depths of noon,
Far down the west it lies.
Its gate, the setting sun, is cleft
Through saffron-colored skies.

Its seas are floods of amber light,
Where fleecy shallops sail,
And violet mists, its silvery domes,
And palace walls enveil.

Athwart the dewy shadows, that
Forever Eastward creep,
The long-winged swallows, silently
In mazy circles sweep.

It is the realm of finished toil —
To weary hands a boon —
And twixt the day and twilight lies
This Land of the Afternoon.

II

THE MOTHER-HEART

Hushed were the songs of the angels and pale
On the dawn's field of gold was the guiding star's ray —
Wearied, the shepherd Kings slept — and the Babe
On the breast of the Virgin in soft slumber lay —
And she whispered: Forget Sweet, thy heavenly throne
And O, for a little while, be just mine own.

Cherubs thy playmates will be, but to me
Thou wilt run for thy hurts to be kissed and made well;
Legions of ministering angels shall be
By thy side, but no care shall thy mother's excel.
Then remember not now, Sweet, thy heavenly throne,
But O, for a little while, be just mine own.

These hands like pink rose leaves that press on my heart,
Heavy burdens must carry ere victory be won.
Though dear to the Lord of the whole world thou art —
Ah! there's no love like my love for thee, Little Son.
Then forget Sweet, thy mission and heavenly throne,
And O, for a little while, be just mine own.

THE LILY OF ISRAEL

Effulgence, never seen before,
  Fills sky and sea and slumbering earth
And to the farthest angel tells
  The message of the Saviour's birth.

The dazzling worlds in heaven's dome
  Grow pale before that wondrous light,
For planet never shone as shines
  The Star of Bethlehem to-night.

And 'neath that star a slender girl
  With soft brown eyes, hears angels sing
And whispers to her new-born son:
  "Light of the World! My babe, my
    King!"

BLOWN BY THE BREATH OF GOD

Call you this chance? A tiny seed
Is blown by wandering winds that speed
O'er land and sea. On ocean's breast
'Tis swept and whirled; then flung to rest
Upon a lonely isle, 'mid reed
And sedge, and many a straggling weed.
Lo! soon the isle a flowery mead
Becomes, with brilliant blossoms drest.
Call you this chance?

THE BREATH OF GOD

Oft-times a word or kindly deed
Bestowed upon some soul in need —
Some soul where Love is never guest —
Transforms the heart by hate opprest,
'Till flowers the noisome weeds succeed.
Call you this chance?

WITHIN THE STONE

A marble fragment lay for years
  By roadside dust defiled;
The low clouds dropped on it their tears,
  The sunshine on it smiled;
And but a worthless stone it seemed,
Wherein no trace of beauty gleamed.

But one who wrought with wondrous art —
  And not with art alone,
For love divine dwelt in his heart —
  Took home the piece of stone,
And broke the rough, stained part away,
And lo! a face within it lay.

A thorn-crowned face, so sad that, when
One looked on it, he wept;
So loving that through hearts of men
A new devotion crept;
And many a wandering soul, that sweet
Face guided to the Master's feet.

UNANSWERED PRAYER

Against the frozen face
  Of earth, I lay my own
And softly pleading, make
    My longing known.

Sweet Mother Earth give me,
  I beg, one little spray
Of perfumed flower to cheer
    This wintry day.

She answers not, nor opes
  Her eyes. But well I know
That Nature's heart still beats
    Beneath the snow.

Then, of the stream I ask,
One water-lily bud,
To deck the dreary hour.
The ice-bound flood

Makes no reply, nor stirs
His crystal sheet, but know
I well, that still, deep down,
His life-tides flow.

My spirit oft, on wings
Of some impatient prayer,
Soars up to Heaven's gate
And clamors there.

And though no opening door
  Lets me his countenance see,
I know my Father's love
    Yet burns for me.

THE FLOWER OF DUTY

In silence, and with progress all unseen,
Throughout the cycle of a hundred years,
The century plant attains its daily growth,
Until at last the gorgeous bloom appears.

So, when some glorious deed for duty done,
The world with admiration stirs, we know
That through a life of little tasks fulfilled
Was formed the bud whose bursting thrilled
us so.

ONLY BELIEVE

Poor trembling heart, when heaven seems
Far off and hopes fade like the gleams
That shine from half forgotten dreams,
Believe — only believe!

When gathering tempests meet thy sight
And not one little ray of light
Illumes the dark and dreaded night,
Believe — only believe!

When fierce temptations o'er thy soul
Like surging, sweeping torrents roll
And faith drifts almost past control,
Believe — only believe!

ONLY BELIEVE

If some great cross before thine eyes
Hides from thy sight the glittering prize,
The crown that waits beyond the skies,
Believe — only believe!

If thou would'st reach those regions blest,
Where far beyond the golden west,
Earth's weary pilgrims find sweet rest,
Believe — only believe!

Poor guilty heart, whate'er thy sin,
Christ's blood can make thee pure within,
Thou canst his loving pardon win.
Believe — only believe!

A BLOSSOM FOR GOOD FRIDAY

When on the cross our dear Lord hung,
The tears that anguish from him wrung
Bedewed the ground. When lo! upsprung

From each a little flower, whose hue,
Like Syria's sunny skies, was blue.
Outspreading from the cross they grew,

And whispered to the little knot
Of women weeping round the spot;
" The Master says, ' Forget me not. ' "

A TWILIGHT VISION

Gray twilight shadows lay about
The cheerless little cell,
Where sat an aged monk whose thoughts
Held him 'neath gloomy spell.
He mused in deep humility
Upon a long life's span
All spent within the cloister walls,
And thus his reverie ran:
"My days have passed like counted beads
Upon a rosary strung
With prayer and fast, with matins, mass,
And peaceful vespers sung.
And in those hours of work, when some
Have painted pictures rare,

And some wrote books of blessed saints,
Who spent their lives in prayer,
I have done naught but try each day,
'Mid childish sport and strife,
To teach the village boys. Dear Lord,
Forgive my useless life!"

Then glorious grew the dusky cell
With light, but not of sun,
Nor moon, nor stars, but shining from
The radiant form of One
With tender face and pierced hands,
Who softly said:

"Not so,
My faithful servant, thou hast done
As much as they; for, lo!
The beauty of their painted work
With fleeting time departs,
But thou hast pictured lasting scenes

On little children's hearts.
And while the pens of others wrote
With ink that fades away,
The words thou hast imprinted on
My children's minds will stay
Till they and thou and I shall meet
In Paradise the Fair."

Then paled the light,— the vision fled,
And on his knees in prayer,
Ecstatic from the Saviour's words,
The aged brother fell.
And, like a soothing mother, Night
Came to the little cell.

TWO CALLS

Saul, journeying to Damascus, heard
A voice speak from on high,
And saw a blinding cross of flame
Gleam in the dazzling sky.
But, soul! wait not for such a call,
Nor think thou art forgot
Because to thee the Saviour's voice
In trumpet tones comes not.

While morning mists hung low above
The waves of Galilee,
And chilly winds swept from the hills
Across the white capped sea,
Two weary fisher brothers toiled

Their broken nets to mend,
When softly spake the Master's voice,
As friend speaks unto friend:
" Come follow me! " and Oh! so sweet
The wandering Savior's call,
They straightway left their ship and home
For Him forsaking all.

So now to some Christ gently calls
Sometimes through look or word
Of those we love, did we but list,
His whisper could be heard.
His voice is in the slow winged clouds
The never silent sea
O Soul! the Master even now
Is softly calling thee.

WHEN DAYLIGHT DAWNS

Now daylight dawns, and praises spring
From every song bird's throat!
While, veil-like, over mountain tops
The mists of morning float.

Dear God, all through the night thine eye
Hath watched the sick and sad;
In pity smile on them, and make
Thy suffering children glad.

Keep thou the pure still pure; and should
Some wayward wanderer stray
In dangerous paths, to save him, Lord,
Stretch forth thy hand to-day.

Then, when this now triumphant sun
  Sinks in the golden west,—
When stars shine out, and every bird
  Flies to its sheltered nest,

Draw nearer to us, God of Love,
  Bend down thy pitying face,
And in thine everlasting arms
  Fold us in close embrace.

HE CARETH FOR ALL

Far out to sea a little bird,
In wild confusion, flew.
The red sun set, star after star
Came into view,
And still the fluttering wings in vain
Essayed to win the nest again.

The distant worlds, through boundless space
Unswerving kept their way;
The whirling earth sped on without
Change or delay;
Old spheres burned out; new ones, that night,
Flashed into brilliancy of light.

One eye supreme the rhythmic march
Of planets thus controlled,
One hand there was, whose hollow palm
Could all enfold,
And yet, from where each cry is heard,
That eye beheld the fainting bird;

And, guided by that mighty hand,
Across the billows dark
It flew, and sank to rest upon
A passing bark.
Think'st thou, O, storm-tossed soul! that He
Doth not thy weary fluttering see?

HANS AND THE GOLDEN APPLE

A LEGEND

The priest's own eyes were tearful,
The women softly wept,
For, just across the mountain
An avalanche had swept,
And out of all the family
Of Gustave, there was left
But Lise, the year old baby,
Of home and friends bereft.

The old priest asked an offering
From each, however small,
And told them, that the dear Lord,
Who saw and loved them all,

Well knew they had but little
To spare the orphan waif.
But what they lent in this way
To God, would come back safe.

Now Hans, "the ever hungry,"
Had set out just at dawn
To seek the pastor's heifer,
Which far astray had gone.
And when back home he brought her,
The priest, for well earned treat,
Gave him a rosy apple,
Too nice to quickly eat.

So safe within his pocket
The apple went to mass,
And, wearied out with walking,
Hans fell asleep, Alas!

And now, behold! unto him
Appeared the Holy Child,
In brightly shining garments,
And said in accents mild:

"Dear little Hans, for My sake,
Give Lise thine apple red."
And as Hans, wondering, 'wakened,
The lovely vision fled.
So when the carved alms basin
He passed, the old priest stopped
Surprised to see Hans' apple
Among the kreutzers dropped.

But when upon the altar
He placed it, strange to say,
Lo! 'Mid the copper kreutzers,
A *golden apple* lay.

And in the pastor's garden
The tree, which heretofore
Had borne the rosy apples,
Brought forth that kind no more —

But shining yellow pippins
(That men might not forget
Hans and the golden apple)
It bore and bears them yet.

ONE GIFT I ASK

Through weary days and sleepless nights
I fast and pray;
And of my listening Lord I ask,
The same alway —
That He will to His child impart
Pureness of heart.

The pure in heart God's face shall see.
And does not this
Include the whole ecstatic scale
Of promised bliss?
Can souls which His dear presence gain
More joy attain?

ONE GIFT I ASK

I need not plead with Him to give
Me every grace
That makes the spirit beautiful;
For, if God's face
I am to see, He will bestow
All else, I know.

And so, through days of prayer and fast,
I only try
To win that purity of heart
Which, by and by,
The wondrous boon will gain for me,
God's face to see.

PRISONERS OF HOPE

Within a narrow cell
A captive lies.
Beyond his prison bars
The summer skies
Are smiling in the earth's
Uplifted face —
And, far away, the hills
And clouds embrace.

And while of boundless plains,
Unfettered streams
And shady forest depths
He sadly dreams,

His listening ear is bent —
  Some foot may be
Approaching, even now
  To set him free.

So in its narrow cell
  The spirit lies,
And dreams of all the joys
  Of paradise,
And listens for the whirr
  Of rushing wings,
As God's swift messenger
  Deliverance brings.

BISHOP FENELON'S PRAYER

"O Lord! take thou my heart,
I cannot give it thee;
'Tis bound so fast by earthly ties
I cannot wrest it free.
So close love's clinging tendrils twine
How can it be entirely thine?

"And when thou takest it,
Keep it O Lord! for I
Can never keep it for thee while
Earth's tempting voices cry:
'Come back to us, dear heart,'— But Oh!
My Father, do not let it go.

"And save me, Lord, in spite
Of my own self. For when
Sometimes I long for better things,
The wish takes flight again.
So, pitying Lord, I only pray,
Cast not so poor a heart away."

THE FLOWER OF THE RESURRECTION

There was a Blessed Garden
In far off Palestine,
Where grew more beauteous blossoms
Than e'er were elsewhere seen.
About its rock tomb portals,
Where Mary went to weep,
Swayed many a snowy poppy,
The mystic flower of sleep —
And blue forget-me-nots for
Remembrance seemed to pray
In azure clusters, close where
The silent Savior lay.
Then when that queen of mornings

RESURRECTION

Her silvery veil unrolled,
The first fair Easter lily
Burst forth all white and gold
To hail the Resurrection,
The day of joy profound,
Which made that Blessed Garden
Earth's holiest spot of ground.

UNTIL EVENING

What though around me all is dark,
And I am blindly treading
An unknown path, on which fall tears
I cannot keep from shedding?
I know 'twill sometime all be right —
"At eventide there shall be light."

I cannot tell why all day long
The darkness must enfold me;
But well I know who walks beside,
With hand outstretched to hold me —
And faith must be to me as sight
Till evening, when there shall be light.

UNTIL EVENING

Sometimes I think God does not care —
I think he is not heeding
Because He sends no flash of joy
In answer to my pleading —
Then starlike gleams that promise bright:
"At eventide there shall be light."

And so I lay my hand in His,
And ask Him just to guide me.
I will not mind aught else if I
But hear his voice beside me.
And all the shadows shall take flight
When evening comes and there *is* light.

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